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The Revolution Betrayed: Ethiopia, 1974–9

by MICHAEL CHEGE*

IT is now close to five years since a revolution spearheaded by the Ethiopian working class, students, and an assortment of petty-bourgeois elements, overthrew the monarchy of Emperor Haile Selassie I, Elect of God, King of Kings, and the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah. With the Emperor has gone the archaic feudal land system which dominated nearly all aspects of the entire Ethiopian society. Gone too is the feudal aristocracy and the nascent national bourgeoisie which clung tenaciously to the imperial coat-tails with unusual political myopia to the very end.

In has come a self-styled Marxist-Leninist military régime which has carried out extensive land redistribution to the peasantry, and thereby delivered the final death-blow to feudalism and the feudal aristocracy which thrived on it. In 1975 the régime also nationalised major industries and commercial farms. Although, as we shall see shortly, the social classes which were in the vanguard of the revolution have been the pre-eminent victims of military tyranny, this does not in any way detract from the progressive impact of these measures on Ethiopian society as a whole.

Ethiopia, of course, differs fundamentally from most African states. The long history of the core Amhara–Tigre civilisation, with its successive kingdoms rooted in the feudal mode of production, partly explains this. The subjugation of nationalities in the periphery of Ethiopia's central highlands by the Shoan–Amhara nobility is also part of the explanation. So too is Ethiopia's extremely brief period of colonisation in the form of the Italian occupation from 1935 to 1941. In the process, the country experienced an extremely limited level of capitalist achievement. By nearly every index of social and economic development, Ethiopia ranks no higher than fifth from the bottom among African states, yet it is here that the first socialist revolution in the continent has occurred. The issue becomes essentially one of understanding the social basis of revolution in overwhelmingly agrarian, underdeveloped societies.

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The outbreak of both the Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions in largely agrarian and economically backward societies posed questions of cardinal importance to socialist revolutionary theory and practice. They forced into the forefront of political debate various issues relating to the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, the dictatorship of the proletariat in nations with minimal working classes, the revolutionary rôle of progressive intellectuals, the mode of the development of productive forces under socialism, and so on. For better or for worse, all this has gone a long way in extending our knowledge of the modalities of class struggles under revolutionary conditions.

Likewise, Ethiopia's experience provides valuable insights into some of the most basic issues of contemporary African politics: the revolutionary predisposition of the peasantry; the political inclinations of the so-called 'labour aristocracy', the national bourgeoisie, the *petite bourgeoisie*, and the *lumpenproletariat*. On top of that, it offers some useful object-lessons for anyone involved in revolutionary praxis in the Third World. One needs to understand the full interaction of social forces which has made this once-popular revolution veer towards a dictatorship of the military, turning its most avid adherents into its primary victims. Ethiopia provides an object lesson on how easily the most noble revolutionary goals can be betrayed.

Yet, in spite of the unfolding drama of the Ethiopian revolution, and the very real prospects that something useful could be learnt from it, Ethiopia's remains the most under-studied revolution of the Third World. Apart from a few small volumes arising mainly out of direct personal acquaintance with the revolution, there has been no consistent class analysis of the revolution.[1] In the wake of a full-blown social upheaval, the field has been left wide open for scholars like Paul Brietzke to busy themselves with 'land reform' and 'rural development' which he views as the central policies of the *Dirgue*.[2] And in the event, it should be hardly surprising that other scholars have produced a detailed interdisciplinary study whose sole purpose is to explore 'basic developmental problems' of the military régime (whose concern is seen as the 'politics of development'), and to examine the relevance of 'modernisation theories' from Samuel Huntington and his ilk.[3]

[1] John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (London, 1978), is in this author's opinion the best account of the revolution available. See also Heinrich Scholler and Paul Brietzke, *Ethiopia: revolution, law and politics* (Munich, 1976), and David and Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in revolution* (New York, 1978).

[2] Paul Brietzke, 'Land Reform in Revolutionary Ethopia', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (Cambridge), XIV, 4, December 1976, pp. 637–60.

[3] John M. Cohen, Arthur Goldsmith, and John Mellor, *Revolution and Land Reform in Ethiopia*, Centre for International Studies, Cornell University, 1976.

But then it hardly matters because such issues are not of any concern to anyone in Ethiopia, least of all the ruling *Dirgue*. The two fundamental issues affecting the momentum of the revolution in Ethiopia are first, a determination of which social class shall wield state power, and secondly, the question of political self-determination of nationalities subjected over the years to imperial oppression and Amharic feudal chauvinism.

It all bears close resemblance to the Bolshevik experience, but to understand the social basis of the twin problems it is necessary to explore the social origins of the revolution in greater detail.

THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND TO THE REVOLUTION

The nature of the social formation in pre-revolution Ethiopia has been the subject of considerable debate for some time. Margery Perham argued in 1948 that Ethiopian society could not be characterised as feudal because, among other reasons, the nobility had never managed during many centuries to impose a clear and lasting hegemony over the peasantry.[1] Gene Ellis has recently stated that Ethiopia was not feudalist because the constituent elements found in Europe – warrior classes, a hereditary nobility, and vassalage – were either absent or minimal.[2] Others point to the existence of a vast landowning peasantry in order to counter the feudal argument.

What characterises the feudal mode of production, however, is not the presence of a uniform set of mediaeval social organisations – these differed even in Europe – but the fact that the direct producer remains the 'possessor' of the means of production (land, farming equipment, etc.). He determines the labour conditions necessary for the production of his owns means of subsistence, while surplus labour is extracted from him by non-producer classes, *directly* through a host of extra-economic pressures, including force. Surplus extraction takes the form of *corvée* labour, tribute, rents, cash, or part of farm produce.

A whole array of political and ideological institutions are at the same time necessary to reproduce these conditions. Marx himself saw religion in feudal society as a prime formula for fetishising exploitation by making it appear to be divinely ordained.[3] Coercion and the law have their special place, too. It is by no means necessary that the *organisational*

[1] Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (London, 1969 edn).

[2] Gene Ellis, 'The Feudal Paradigm as a Hindrance to Understanding Ethiopia', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, XVI, 2, June 1976, pp. 275–95.

[3] This is what of course leads Nicos Poulantzas to assert that religion as ideology is the 'structure in dominance' in feudal society; *Political Power and Social Classes* (London, 1975), p. 15.

forms which these social elements take be similar through time and space to qualify a mode of production as feudal. Indeed, as Jairus Banaji argues, feudalism is quite consistent even with the preponderance of peasant holdings over *demesne* land.[1]

This applied to Ethiopia, a country with an extremely complex land-tenure system. For simplicity, land tenure outside the sparsely populated pastoralist areas fell under two categories.[2] In the northern Tigre–Amharic provinces, land ownership was vested with the kinship group under the *rist* land-tenure system; *rist* land was seldom alienated and there was no land market to speak of. The interstices of *rist* lands were taken up by imperial land grants to the nobility (known as *gult*) and church lands granted in perpetuity to Ethiopia's monophysite Coptic Church. Both extracted surpluses from the peasantry in tribute, produce, rents, and services. The classic feudal trinity of nobleman, priest, and peasant was thus completed.

The second category of land ownership applied principally to the southern provinces, and had come into force in the last quarter of the nineteenth century following Menelik II's conquest of these areas. Imperial allocation of *gult* rights to Amharic and other northern nobility, and the elevation of local *balabbat* (chiefs) to landlord status, brought the feudal frontier to the Empire's southern border. It also turned over 60 per cent of the peasantry into tenants.

The subjugation of the southern peoples by a predominantly Amharic nobility, and the high premium which the ruling class placed on Amharic culture in the interests of its own cohesion (even to the extent of making Amharinya the official language, and the medium of educational instruction in all schools), helped to make sure that class struggles would don the mask of ethnic ideologies. The question of oppressed nationalities was destined to loom large after the revolution. In the meantime, monarchical despotism would keep it in check.

The political fusion of the interests of landed upper classes with those of a weak bourgeoisie in predominantly peasant societies is seen by Barrington Moore as the prime recipe for the emergence of dictatorship. The configuration of class forces underlying monarchical despotism under Haile Selassie is almost symmetrical with that observed by Moore in the French *ancien régime*:

> Up until about the middle of the eighteenth century the modernization of French society took place through the crown. As part of this process

[1] Jairus Banaji, 'The Peasantry in the Feudal Model of Production', in *Journal of Peasant Studies* (London), III, 3, 1976.

[2] See John Markakis, *Ethiopia: anatomy of a traditional polity* (London, 1974), pp. 73–140.

there grew up a fusion between nobility and bourgeoisie quite different from that in England. This fusion took place through the monarchy rather than in opposition to it and resulted, to speak in what may be here a useful if inaccurate shorthand, in the 'feudalization' of a considerable section of the bourgeoisie, rather than the other way round.[1]

Donald Levine depicted the emerging Ethiopian bourgeoisie as a 'new nobility' by virtue of its modern technocratic abilities, use of land for commercial purposes, and investment in commerce and urban real estate.[2] Yet at the same time, this admittedly small bourgeoisie was irrevocably beholden to the Emperor and his feudal entourage, while non-Amharic capitalists – mostly Muslims, Greeks, Arabs, and Italians – were systematically excluded from state power. Foreign capital – the dominant fraction of capital – was unquestioningly loyal to the Emperor.

In France, royal absolutism finally succumbed to a bourgeois revolution supported by a peasantry trapped between the pressures of feudalism and an encroaching agrarian capitalism. This was not to be the case in Ethiopia, where the intrusion of capitalism in the countryside remained minimal precisely because those class forces which would have wished to undertake it were held on a tight leash by the feudal classes. Even when international finance capital intervened to promote petty commodity production based on family households, it did so on an extremely limited scale.[3] Overall, Marina Ottaway thinks that there were only about 5,000 large commercial farms covering perhaps 750,000 hectares in Ethiopia as of 1975,[4] in a country with an estimated 8·5 million hectares of land under cultivation.

Yet the Ethiopian bourgeoisie did attempt to take up commercial agriculture as is evidenced by the activities of the Ethiopian Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank. This was particularly so with coffee, whose small modern plantation sector was dominated entirely by Ethiopian capitalists.[5] This class, however, could not push for the institution of a land market since, as scions of aristocratic families or

[1] J. Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston, 1966), p. 109.

[2] Donald N. Levine, *Wax and Gold: tradition and innovation in Ethiopian culture* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 183–90.

[3] Projects of this kind were not only few, but involved small numbers of peasants. In 1971 the famous Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit had 4,426 tenants, while the World Bank-supported schemes at Setit Humera and Wollam involved only 500 and 700 familes, respectively. See Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: feudalism and modernization in Ethiopia* (London, 1975), pp. 127–30.

[4] Marina Ottaway, 'Social Classes and Corporate Interests in the Ethiopian Revolution', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, XIV, 3, September 1976, p. 472.

[5] See Gilkes, op. cit. pp. 142 and 160–1.

beneficiaries of imperial land grants, they had more than enough land at their disposal. Like the bourgeoisie in Tsarist Russia, they were too closely identified with feudalism to be its destroyer and thus usher in a democratic capitalist régime, as had happened in England. The Ethiopian bourgeoisie did make an attempt to assume state power under Endalkatchew Makonnen from February to July 1974, and even produced a 'classic bourgeois constitution' for the country,[1] but they never came out decisively against landlordism. Against the rising militancy of the working class and the urban *petite bourgeoisie*, this failure proved to be their undoing.

Neither did the peasantry feature as a revolutionary force, contrary to expectations by Frantz Fanon and others. This owes a lot to the low development of agrarian capitalism, which left the traditional modes of existence of the peasantry largely undisrupted. As Eric Wolf has demonstrated, peasant uprisings in the present century have been characteristically the business of socially uprooted or semi-proletarianised peasantries.[2] In a different historical context, Barrington Moore has shown how the double pressure of encroaching capitalism and continued feudal exploitation act in unison to produce peasant rebellions.[3] None of these conditions was met in Ethiopia. We have already shown the small extent of plantation agriculture. Even more striking is the fact that most of Ethiopia's coffee – the country's largest export crop – was gathered *in its wild state* in Kaffa, Illubabor, and Wollega.[4] The production of hides and skins, the second largest export commodities, involved no capitalist enterprises, but rather traditional husbandry. What is more, the social bonds between the peasantry, the Church, and the nobility, particularly in the North, had remained strong, unlike in pre-revolutionary Russia and China.[5]

Under the circumstances, such peasant resistance as was bound to occur remained sporadic, short lived, and backward-looking, as most peasant rebellions tend to be without outside leadership. 'The peasant utopia', wrote Wolf, 'is the free village, untrammeled by tax collectors, labour recruiters, large land-owners and officials.'[6] Indeed, in Ethiopia

[1] Ottaway, loc. cit. p. 479.

[2] Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1969).

[3] Moore, op. cit. pp. 473–83.

[4] Gilkes, op. cit. p. 141.

[5] Barrington Moore, op.cit. p. 469, argues that 'where the links arising out of the relationship between overlord and peasant community are strong the tendency toward peasant rebellion (and later revolution) is feeble'. This relationship is predicated on low levels of material exploitation of the peasantry. For evidence in Ethiopia, see Markakis, op. cit. pp. 100–2, speaking of the North.

[6] Wolf, op. cit. p. 294.

there is evidence of tax rebellions in Bale in 1964, Gojjam in 1968, and even riots against eviction by capitalist landlords elsewhere. These, however, were confined to the narrower frontier of capitalist development in the countryside. For the most part, the peasantry remained politically inert. Nothing illustrates this better than the fact that even though the 1974 revolution broke against the background of a drought in which 200,000 peasants perished, there were no attacks on the full grain-bins of the landords by starving peasants trekking to the cities to beg for food.[1]

With the bourgeoisie and the peasantry unable to carry out a revolution, the mantle fell to the oppressed urban social classes: the working class, the *petite bourgeoisie*, and the students.

Poulantzas breaks down the *petite bourgeoisie* into two class fractions: the 'old' merges petty capital and personal labour in itself – shopkeepers, craftsmen, small traders, etc. – while the 'new' is made up of management, the civil service, and in general the 'intermediate layers' of both private and public bureaucracies. Characteristically, Poulantzas traces the unity of the *petite bourgeoisie* to the 'political and ideological determination of social classes', thus ruling out a commonality of objective economic interests.[2] Markakis and Ayele observe a unity of these 'old' and 'new' elements in Ethiopia, but transcend Poulantzas by tracing this to the marginalisation suffered by both groups at the hands of more or less the same forces: landlordism, and the big capitalists.[3] Both fractions of the *petite bourgeoisie*, for instance, were excluded from commerical land enterprises at a time when the bourgeois scions of the aristocracy were increasingly investing in them. The real beneficiaries of small-scale agricultural development projects, such as the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit, were in fact not the peasants but the 'merchants, officials and a small number of the educated petty bourgeoisie'.[4] Yet only with the break-up of feudal land ownership could more of such projects be undertaken; this explains the zeal with which land reform was advocated by the *petite bourgeoisie*, notably the planners and technocrats in government ministries. In addition, the inflationary spiral experienced in the 1970s, emanating from both international and domestic sources, consolidated the unity of this class, given the elimination of small capital savings which inevitably accompanies capitalist crises, and the devaluation of earnings of the 'new' *petite bourgeoisie*.

[1] See Martin Meredith's account in the *Sunday Times* (London), 25 November 1973, p. 8.
[2] Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London, 1975), pp. 208–50.
[3] Markakis and Ayele, op. cit. pp. 48–54. [4] Ibid. p. 58.

The militancy of the working class is much easier to explain. The unionisation of labour in Ethiopia became legal as recently as 1963. Even then, the policy of officially harassing unions with the expressed view of producing a docile labour force to attract foreign capital continued in much the same way as it had before. 'In its first seven years', wrote Markakis, 'CELU [Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions] managed to secure only thirteen collective agreements throughout the country.'[1] Even worse, in the years immediately preceding the revolution, the scandalously low wages had been severely whittled down by inflation. The retail price index for Addis Ababa jumped about 30 points between December 1972 and July 1973, with food, clothing, and household goods leading the way. In the first three months of 1974 – the most active phase of the revolution – Gilkes estimates that prices were rising 'uncontrollably at the rate of 80 per cent per quarter'.[2] When the Ethiopian labour force joined the revolutionary fray, it did so with a sense of radicalism never associated with it at any time in the past.

The task of infusing ideological cohesion into the various petty-bourgeois and working-class forces fell to students in general, and in particular to Marxist–Leninist militants at Haile Selassie I University. Even then, one must reckon that the revolutionary movement remained largely unco-ordinated and without a recognisable political vanguard.[3] Like so many things in Ethiopia, the class background of the students in Addis Ababa is difficult to determine. Ottaway argues that from the mid-1960s on, 'the largest number [of students] at the one University came from urban families of traders, clerks, policemen, lower-level government employees – in other words, the Ethiopian petty bourgeoisie'.[4] If so, and in the light of the foregoing analysis of the Ethiopian *petite bourgeoisie*, there was clearly a very good reason for their struggle against the backward landed-class forces which fettered the creation of productive forces and thus obstructed the development of the *petite bourgeoisie* in the process. In fact, given the uncontested fact that 80 per cent of the students were Amhara–Tigre – that is, from areas where *rist* family tenure existed – it could be argued that what prompted their cry 'land to the tiller' was the clear need to draw the southern peasantry into a political coalition against the landlords. And that is exactly what happened.

As in the Bolshevik revolution, the final collapse of the Ethiopian imperial order was signalled by a succession of military mutinies,

[1] Markakis, op. cit. p. 169.
[2] Gilkes, op. cit. p. 169.
[3] This was to prove to be the Achilles heel of the revolutionary movement.
[4] Ottaway, loc. cit. p. 475.

popular demonstrations, and industrial unrest.[1] On 12 January 1974 the Fourth Army at Negele mutinied over 'trade union'-type grievances, to be followed the next month by other mutinies at Asmara, Massawa, Harar, and Addis Ababa. In the meantime, school-teachers went on strike in mid-February demanding pay increases and the repeal of the World-Bank inspired 'Education Sector Review'.[2] High-school students joined the ever-rebellious university students. When the teachers finally received an audience from the Emperor, they added land reform to their grievances.

The political action of the 'new' *petite bourgeoisie*, articulated in this manner, took place alongside agitation emanating from the 'old' *petite bourgeoisie*. Taxi drivers and transporters went on strike in February to protest against directives that fares should not be increased at a time when oil prices had tripled. In April 1974, urban Muslims – the traditional small trader class – staged a demonstration, estimated at 100,000 strong, calling for democratic rights, an end to discrimination against Muslims and, most important, the *right to own land like all other Ethiopians*.

In the previous month, the C.E.L.U. had called a highly effective general strike, followed by a series of stoppages by workers in public companies, Addis Ababa municipality, and nearly all public utilities, even though unionisation was still illegal there. From then on till the end of May, 'a wave of strikes, boycotts and other types of militant action paralyzed the public sector, threw the country into a turmoil, and maintained the momentum of popular movement'.[3]

The lame-duck administration of Prime Minister Akillu Habte Wolde gave way in February 1974 to the bourgeois régime of Endalkatchew Makonnen with its putative anti-feudal disposition. Hoping to exorcise the revolutionary spectre with sweet promises of land and constitutional reforms, the régime watched the upheaval with characteristic political infirmity. When the Endalkatchew régime resigned in August, it was at

[1] The events of this period are summarised in Colin Legum (ed), *Africa Contemporary Record, 1974–75* (London, 1975), pp. B160–80.

[2] The package of policies proposed in *Education: challenge to the nation. Report of the Education Sector Review* (Addis Ababa, Ministry of Education, 1972), posed a further economic threat to the *petite bourgeoisie*. They would have restricted secondary and university enrolment, ostensibly because the absorptive capacity of the state bureaucracy had been exhausted, but actually in order to siphon more state revenues into capital investment of the sort needed to prop up the bourgeoisie. Further, the report also called for resources to be channelled into technical and non-formal education in the countryside in order to boost commodity production. That the World Bank should take an interest in this hardly calls for explanation, but the teachers found it patently objectionable.

[3] Markakis and Ayele, op. cit. p. 93.

the request of a paralysed monarchy dancing to the tunes of the military – from this moment onwards, in fact, Ethiopia became an armed dictatorship in all but name. By September 1974 the military ascendancy was secure enough for the soldiers to do away with the Emperor.

One important lesson could be distilled from the course of the Ethiopian revolution as of then: the social classes involved were small in absolute and relative terms. This speaks against those who rule out prospects of rapid structural change in Africa because the would-be revolutionary classes are small. Markakis estimated that in 1970 the *petite bourgeoisie* – educated administrators, merchants, and officials – totalled only a 'few tens of thousands' in a society then of 25 million.[1] The working class in 1974 numbered no more that 150,000, about 80,000 of whom were C.E.L.U. members. And amongst the working class, it was the highly skilled technical and white-collar workers who were most militant, namely the much maligned 'labour aristocracy' of African radicalism, frequently presumed to be a trusted ally of international capital.[2] Some, like Ottaway, thought it paradoxical. In fact, that this was the case ought to have come as no surprise to anyone conversant with Marxian analysis of exploitation, and the inevitable devaluation of labour power among skilled workers which comes with the advance of capitalism.[3]

CLASS AND STATE POWER

'The key question of every revolution', Lenin wrote, 'is undoubtedly the question of state power: which class holds power which decides everything'.[4] In Ethiopia this fundamental question was already at the forefront in August 1974 when the military, as one fraction of the *petite bourgeoisie*, took advantage of the vacuum created by the lack of a

[1] Markakis, op. cit. p. 182.

[2] Though old in socialist literature, the African variant of this view owes much to Frantz Fanon. It was elaborated in 1967 by Giovanni Arrighi, 'International Corporations, Labor Aristocracies, and Economic Development in Tropical Africa', in Arrighi and John S. Saul (eds.), *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (New York, 1973), pp. 105–51.

[3] Ottaway, loc. cit. expresses the 'paradox' that it was white-collar and skilled workers who were most militant. The rate of exploitation of labour is expressed as the ratio between surplus value and variable capital (in short, wages). By this formula skilled labour produces value many more times than its counter value. The ratio is lower for unskilled labour. Hence skilled labour is *more* exploited. See Geoffrey Kay, *Development and Underdevelopment* (London, 1975), p. 54. For observations of similar exploitation and militancy among skilled agricultural workers and bank employees in Kenya, see Michael Cowen and Kabiru Kinyanjui, *Some Problems of Capital and Class in Kenya*, Occasional Paper No. 26, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, 1977, pp. 32–55.

[4] V. I. Lenin, 'On the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution', in *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1972 edn.), Vol. 25, p. 366.

revolutionary organisation and imposed itself at the vanguard of the movement. When Haile Selassie was led from the Imperial Palace on 12 September 1974 to the simple house where he eventually died, it was by the soldiers, not by an organised vanguard of militants like the pro-Bolshevik Petrograd Soviet of 1917.

It was the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces (the *Dirgue*), slowly edging into power since the mutinies early in the year, which arrested, prosecuted, judged, and executed leading members of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, most notably in the massacres of 22–24 November 1974. It was as if General Kornilov's attempted *coup d'état* in September 1917 had succeeded in toppling Kerensky and suppressing the Bolsheviks. Indeed, had the Ethiopian Marxist intelligentsia pondered the fate of Kornilov at the hands of the Petrograd Soviet, they would have done more to organise a proletarian constituency in the capital. As it was, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (E.P.R.P.) which was best placed to do this, only fought ideologically through its newspaper, *Democracia*, in the underground without overt mobilisation. Other radical elements preferred to school the new rulers in Marxism–Leninism, oblivious of the fact that the idea of the military as a vanguard for social change had more to do with Morris Janowitz than either Marx or Lenin.

Although the *Dirgue* was from 1975 onwards to parade itself to the outside world as the champion of Marxism–Leninism in Africa, it is vital to remember that its *coup d'état* was based on a solid bourgeois and nationalist platform, epitomised in its slogan *Ethiopia Tikdem*, or 'Ethiopia First'. In his initial public speech on this new policy, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam explained that it called for an end to selfishness, with the emphasis now on hard work, unity, diligence, heroism, and love for country.[1] Jomo Kenyatta, south of the border, leading a solid bourgeois régime, couched his speeches in almost exactly such terms. True to form, the *Dirgue* had on 16 September 1974 declared its policy as anti-capitalist and anti-Marxist, a position that Mobutu and Senghor, among others, have also espoused.

The *Dirgue*, it must be remembered, took unto itself the task of destroying what it called the 'feudal-bourgeois' order only *after* the two civilian Premiers it had given the task of instituting a bourgeois government had failed. Even as late as March 1975, the *Dirgue* was still toying with the idea of a constitutional monarchy and the preservation of church estates.

[1] See *Africa Contemporary Record, 1974–5*, pp. B188–9.

In February 1975 the *Dirgue* took the 'socialist' measure of nationalising 101 leading companies. Hardly different from what several African capitalist régimes have done, this involved in some cases outright acquisition of firms but in most cases partial government ownership and government – i.e. military – participation in management. For the moment, the much debated worker committees would have to be shelved. In April, the *Dirgue* decreed the abolition of land rents, and 'nationalised' all rural land, declaring this to be the 'collective property of Ethiopian people'. Individual families were granted 'possessory rights' over rural land not exceeding 25 acres, and one urban house. In effect, this 'nationalisation' measure only served to confirm the *rist* family-holdings in the North, and to restore peasant land-holder rights in the South. With all its intonations of collective effort, the profound accent of the 1975 land reform proclamation lay in its emphasis on expanded peasant production to serve as a basis for industrialisation.[1]

All this is part and parcel of the philosophical underpinning of most African régimes. What made Ethiopia special is that the feudal class had to be destroyed for this to happen. The men responsible for this traditionally bourgeois mission were the putative revolutionaries in uniform. The *Dirgue* will be remembered in history for having committed the infamous act of carrying out a capitalist revolution in the name of Marxism and, even worse, for having destroyed Ethiopian socialists in the name of socialism. For, having eliminated feudal and bourgeois power on the right, the military now trained their guns to the left.

Confronted by denial of democratic rights, wage freezes, continuing inflation, and exhortations to support *Dirgue*-appointed managements, labour under the C.E.L.U. took to the streets against the *Dirgue* (particularly in September 1975) as it had under the *ancien régime*. This time, however, the demonstrations were not to work. The C.E.L.U. had not heeded Trotsky's maxim:

> In order to conquer power, the proletariat needs more than a spontaneous insurrection. It needs a suitable organization, it needs a plan, it needs a conspiracy. Such is the Leninist view of this question.[2]

The price the proletariat paid for this neglect was its own destruction as a political force. With the leadership of the C.E.L.U. largely emasculated by detention and assassination, the *Dirgue* moved to dismantle what

[1] According to the Proclamation to Provide for the Public Ownership of Rural Lands, No. 31 of 1975, p. 94, 'it is necessary to distribute land, increase rural income, and thereby lay the basis for the expansion of industry and the growth of the economy by providing for the participation of the peasantry in the national market'.

[2] Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1932), Vol. III, p. 170.

was still a militant labour movement in late 1975, but not before the soldiers had shot dead some protesting workers.[1] In place of the C.E.L.U., the *Dirgue* substituted another of its repressive arms: the All-Ethiopian Trade Union. The cycle of violence was completed when the new A.E.T.U. leaders were assassinated by workers and militants protesting against the policies of the *Dirgue*.[2] The greatest irony of all lay in the massacre of an estimated 600–1,000 workers and students preceding and following the 1977 May Day demonstrations.[3]

The political forces of the radical intelligentsia proved more durable than those of the working class, but they too in the end had to give way to armed repression more ferocious than that experienced by the working class.

By late 1975, when it became clear that the *Dirgue* had no intention of handing over power to civilians, the intelligentsia split into two camps: the *Meison* (All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (E.P.R.P.). Popular interpretations of the first as a pro-Soviet and European-trained organisation, and the latter as Maoist and American-educated, out to be dismissed for the analytical incantations which they are. The *Meison* grouped together 'many sons and daughters of former aristocratic families who had spent years in exile', thoroughly alienated by the decadence of the feudal régime.[4] Though calling themselves Marxists, they were prepared to countenance a military dictatorship which clamped down on all democratic rights and suppressed the working class violently. This they did on the spurious grounds that the oppressed classes in Ethiopia lacked organisational and political sophistication to carry on the revolution, which only the military had. The *Meison* leaders imagined that as the 'Marxist' ideological mentors of the *Dirgue*, they could tele-guide the revolution to a point where they could control the state bureuacracy, relegating the military to the barracks.[5] Hence the zealous work on political

[1] On 26 September 1975, the military shot seven Ethiopian Airline workers and wounded 43 others for protesting against the arrest of union leaders detained for distributing anti-*Dirgue* literature. More than 500 Airline employees were detained in this incident. The reactionary use to which 'labour aristocracy' theories can be put is illustrated by the official plea that these workers were a 'privileged caste' after all.

[2] For the *Dirgue's* admission that the C.E.L.U. had become infiltrated by E.P.R.P. militants and so-called 'non-conformist' petty bourgeois leadership, see *Ethiopian Herald* (Addis Ababa), 27 April 1977, p. 5, and *Africa* (London), April 1977, p. 12.

[3] Markakis and Ayele, op. cit. p. 168.

[4] Colin Legum (ed.), *Africa Contemporary Record, 1976–7* (London, 1977), p. B180.

[5] In a sense, therefore, the *Meison* would have completed the capitalist class mission undertaken by the *Dirgue* and 'rationalised' government in the Weberian sense, something quite consistent with their class origins. The *Meison* sought to succeed where their parents had failed, but, like the military, in the name of Marx.

education by the *Meison* at the Provisional Office for Mass Organisation Affairs, and the Yekatit '66 Ideological School.[1] When the *Dirgue* woke up to this strategy in August 1977, it reacted in characteristic fashion by meting out 'revolutionary justice' (which simply means murder) to at least 60 *Meison* functionaries. The head of the movement, Haile Fida, was jailed (and is now presumed dead), while other leaders fled to exile.

In contrast, the E.P.R.P. was not only the first modern political party in Ethiopia, but also the only genuine Marxist–Leninist organisation. Having been forced to operate underground since its inception in 1972, the E.P.R.P. has been the object of much vilification at the hands of the *Dirgue*, as well as by western and eastern news media.[2] Recruited from urban intellectuals and workers, the party has roots that go back to the anti-monarchy Marxist cells organised in the 1960s. From August 1975, the E.P.R.P. carried out a determined campaign for a 'National Democratic Revolution' that would permit the political participation of all organisations opposed to feudalism and exploitation. It also advocated the granting of all democratic rights to the masses.

Taking the promised 'National Democratic Programme' of the *Dirgue* for the dead letter that it was, the E.P.R.P. was driven to take up arms against the *Dirgue* in September 1976, after the military had declared 'total war' on the E.P.R.P., which had successfully infiltrated the labour movement and peasant associations. In December 1977, diplomats in Addis Ababa were reporting gun battles between the E.P.R.P. and the *Dirgue* 'lasting for some hours at a time in the past months'.[3] Driven to desperation, the *Dirgue* ushered in its notorious 'Red Terror' campaign, giving itself and its sponsored gangs unrestricted licence to murder any suspected E.P.R.P. member or sympathiser. The E.P.R.P. responded by the calculated assassination of members of the *Dirgue*, as well as *Meison* leaders and sympathisers. A bloodbath ensued – indeed, according to an eyewitness report in March 1978, the streets were littered with bodies.[4] By the end of the year the E.P.R.P. was finished as a political force, although by no means physically annihilated. As bourgeois commentators love to say, 'the revolution devours its own children'. In this case, however, it looks as if the *Dirgue's* reign of terror devoured the children of the revolution. And in

[1] The institutions were set up by the *Dirgue* under the May 1976 'Programme for National Democratic Revolution', another hollow promise to involve the masses in politics.

[2] For some useful information, see Markakis and Ayele, op. cit. pp. 154–5 and 162–5; also *Africa Contemporary Record, 1976–7*, pp. B185–7. The E.P.R.P.'s political programme is spelt out in their information bulletin, *Abyot*, Special Issue, February 1978.

[3] *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), 12 December 1977.

[4] Hans Eerik, *The Times* (London), 22 March 1978, p. 1.

the process, it must be remarked, the *Dirgue* received ample assistance from those self-confessed friends of the African revolution: the Soviets and the Cubans.

In his pamphlet, *What is to be Done?*, Lenin delineated the respective rôles in a socialist revolution of, on the one hand, professional revolutionaries drawn from 'the young generation of educated classes', and the working classes on the other.[1] In Ethiopia, the *Dirgue* had on the contrary eliminated the revolutionary intelligentsia and suppressed the working class in the name of Marxism–Leninism. In the face of this gigantic blasphemy it should surprise no one that the military Government proceeded to build its power on social classes (and in a manner) that neither Marx nor Lenin would have approved. The *Dirgue* began by arming urban *kebeles* – associations composed of illiterate members of the *lumpenproletariat* – which survived by extracting surpluses in cash or kind at gunpoint, much like Idi Amin's Nubian mercenaries, including part of the rents collected from nationalised houses. Corrupt, undisciplined, and undisciplinable, the urban *kebeles* came to be dreaded by the population for their unrestrained terror: they were used by the *Dirgue* to exterminate the E.P.R.P. and radical youth who were in favour of a popular democratic revolution.[2]

In the countryside, the régime increasingly came to rely upon the support of those with medium-sized landholdings. Although the evidence is sketchy, it seems that they dominated the newly created 'peasant associations' under the aegis of the All-Ethiopian Peasant Movement.[3] Yet this is the class which had played the most counter-revolutionary rôle against the dissolution of small estates in the land redistribution campaign of 1975. When the military sent students into the countryside under the *zemecha* campaign in 1974 to implement the land reform programme, they encountered the stiffest resistance from this latter-day Ethiopian version of the *Vendée*.[4] Most landords had fled. At another level, all peasants rich and poor, though united in breaking up feudal estates, were opposed to land collectivisation which *zemecha*

[1] V. I. Lenin, 'What is to be Done?', in *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1972 edn.), Vol. v.

[2] *Africa*, March 1978, p. 26; and Eerik, loc. cit. This tallies with Marx's doubts about the *lumpenproletariat* as a revolutionary force, a point raised in the African context by Robin Cohen and David Michael, 'The Revolutionary Potential of the African Lumpenproletariat: a sceptical view', in *Sussex: I.D.S. Bulletin* (Brighton), v, 2/3, October 1973, pp. 31–42.

[3] Cohen, Goldsmith, and Mellor, op. cit. pp. 47–8.

[4] Ibid. pp. 61 and 65. This was mostly in the South. In the North no substantial changes were made to traditional family landholdings. Yet even there overt hostility to anything amounting to collectivisation or break-up of holdings was evident. See Markakis and Ayele, op. cit. pp. 26–7.

actively promoted.[1] Like the Russian peasants who claimed they were for the Bolsheviks who allocated them land, but against the Communists who forced them to collectivise, so too in Ethiopia. When peasant resistance on both fronts against students erupted into violence leaving many of them dead, the Government put a halt to the campaign, leaving the 'middle peasantry' – and even some of the former landlords – dominant in the countryside, notwithstanding land allocation to former tenants.

The effectiveness of peasant associations remained eccentric and highly uneven. They most certainly did not endear themselves to the peasantry by assuming the rôle of tax collector and land-fee gatherer for the Government.[2] On top of that, the attempt to mobilise peasants for the war in Eritrea in mid-1976 was a monumental debâcle in which thousands of ill-prepared soldiers fell to the bullets of well-trained Eritrean guerrillas.[3] There is, so far as one can tell, no evidence of any battle won by the largely peasant 90,000-strong People's Militia recruited in 1977, though there are incidents of mutiny and indiscipline.[4]

On the political rôle of the peasantry, T. Shanin comments that 'in the long run it is the basic weaknesses of the peasantry which have tended to stand out'. This class has proved no match for smaller, closely knit, better organised, technically superior groups and has, time and again, been 'double-crossed' or suppressed politically by force of arms.[5] In Ethiopia, the peasants had been used by practically all of the leading protagonists: the military, the students, the E.P.R.P., the counter-revolutionary landlords and bandits, and even by the most reactionary ethnic movements. In the end, the peasants could not sway the destiny of the revolution, much less that of their own.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

In the course of it all, the only social class to have gone politically and economically unmolested was the *petite bourgeoisie*; indeed, the conditions for its prosperity in both the towns and the countryside had been secured.[6] The contradiction in the policy lay in that, by regenera-

[1] Ibid. pp. 69–72.

[2] A portion of which (like the urban *kebeles*) they retained.

[3] For a graphic account of this debâcle, see *Africa Contemporary Record, 1976–7*, pp. B196–7.

[4] *New African Development* (London), February 1978, p. 24. According to *Africa*, March 1978, 80,000 members of the militia were deployed in the Ogaden against the Western Somali Liberation Front. As everyone knows, the Ethiopian army, let alone the peasants, were unable to halt the Somali advance – it took the Cubans and the Soviets to do this.

[5] T. Shanin, *The Awkward Class* (Oxford, 1972), p. 124.

[6] *Dirgue* policies in 1975 also included substantial 'Ethiopianisation' of small businesses previously run by foreigners. About 30,000 posts in the nationalised industries under Ethiopian management had been created. See Markakis and Ayele, op. cit. pp. 128–9.

ting the *petite bourgeoisie*, the régime also regenerated the traditional Amharic dominance in this class. This was fiercely resisted by petty bourgeois elements from other nationalities which now married their forces with those of discontented peasantries in their own homelands; a marriage made all too easy by the petty bourgeois orientation of the peasantry which Lenin observed over six decades ago. The offspring of this political marriage of forces was the proliferation of ethnic movements seeking autonomy from Amharic domination or bidding for outright secession. Apart from the determination of the class basis of power, this constituted the most intractable problem for the Ethiopian revolution.

On this score nowhere was the régime tested as severely as in Eritrea. This region fell from the frying pan of Italian colonialism during 1941 into the fire of Amharic feudal domination in 1952, and was finally absorbed in the Empire in 1962. The Eritrea *petite bourgeoisie*, a product of Italian capitalist development, was completely locked out of power by feudalism. Appealing to the nationalist instincts of the peasants, it finally determined to mobilise them for guerrilla war. Colonialism had destroyed feudal structures in Eritrea much earlier than in other parts of the Empire, giving it a proportionately larger *petite bourgeoisie*, labour force, and landless peasantry. It was natural, therefore, that anti-feudal resistance should have begun there. Even though it has not been easy to reconcile the interests of the Muslim 'lowland' *petite bourgeoisie* grouped under the Eritrean Liberation Front (E.L.F.), with those of the Christian 'highland' *petite bourgeoisie* under the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (E.P.L.F.), both movements had liberated 95 per cent of the Eritrean countryside by late 1977. They also held all the major towns in Eritrea with the exception of the capital, Asmara, and the port of Massawa, which were then under siege.

As if that was not a sufficient problem for the military Government in Ethiopia, Somali pastoralists under the Western Somali Liberation Front (W.S.L.F.), with assistance from the Somali army, swept the Ogaden during September–October 1977, capturing the railway town of Jigjiga and threatening Harar and Dire Dawa, a mere 60 kilometres from Addis Ababa. At the same time there were at least three separatist movements among the Oromo, the second largest ethnic group in the country, largely based in the South, two in Tigre and one each among the Afars and the Somali–Abo.[1] During 1977, in fact, the *Dirgue* faced

[1] Under the *ancien régime*, the Oromo aristocracy (often Amharicised) supported the Emperor. P. T. W. Baxter, a self-confessed advocate of Oromo nationalism, traces its roots to the politically and economically side-lined Oromo *petite bourgeoisie*: military officers, civil

localised ethnic rebellions in eight out of its 14 provinces, and in all cases responded with force. Against the backdrop of the régime's internal contradictions, Ahmed Nasser of the Eritrean Liberation Front was justified in commenting that Mengistu was 'wrestling with the wind'.[1]

The Bolsheviks, too, were confronted with the political assertiveness of nationalities long oppressed by Tsardom and subjected to Russification, in the same way that Amharisation had been forced upon various Ethiopian peoples. Rather than wrestle with the wind, however, Lenin settled for the principle of national self-determination for oppressed nationalities, and this has become the standard Marxist–Leninist stand on the issue,[2] though honoured more in the breach than in observance, as in Ethiopia's case.

To begin with, Lenin was opposed to the fragmentation of the big states, because they afforded 'indisputable advantages, both from the standpoint of economic progress and that of the interests of the massess'. Lenin, however, believed that genuine democracy could only take root in Russia after the oppressed non-Russian nationalities had been granted full citizenship rights and their territories given the opportunity to become politically autonomous or to secede, if they so wished. National movements could therefore be supported on two grounds: first, when they arose against backward, reactionary, and imperialist forces (even if such national movements happened to be bourgeois); secondly, where they served to promote democracy within the framework of socialist transformation.

Although the Ethiopian Government's 'Programme for National Democratic Revolution' of April 1976 contained firm guarantees for national self-determination, the principle remained a dead letter (just like the proletarian party which it has repeatedly promised). Instead, the *Dirgue* gave every national movement – progressive or reactionary – the choice between 'fatherland or death'. Having arrogated unto itself the rôle of the bourgeoisie, the military was determined to carry this to its logical conclusion: the building of a strong *centralised* state to serve as a market for expanded capitalist production and trade. Thus it was vital to retain Eritrea, where a third of the country's manufac-

servants, students, and politicians. See his 'Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: the Oromo', in *African Affairs* (London), 77, 103, 1978, p. 290.

[1] *New African Development*, December 1977, p. 1185.

[2] V. I. Lenin, 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination', in *Collected Works*, Vol. xx, pp. 393–454, and 'The Socialist Revolution and Right of Nations to Self-Determination', in ibid. Vol. xxii, pp. 143–56.

turing plants were situated, as well as the outlying pastoral areas, the tapping of whose potential was already on the drawing boards.

In contrast it was the E.P.R.P., true to the Leninist position on the national question, which managed to build an alliance with progressive national movements, like the Marxist E.P.L.F. in Eritrea, the Tigre People's Liberation Front (T.P.L.F.), and the Oromo People's Liberation Organisation. The bonds which united these organisations at war against the *Dirgue* only became unstuck with mounting evidence in 1978 that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party had no chance of assuming state power, at which juncture the T.P.L.F. assumed an ethnic stand against the 'Amharic' E.P.R.P. in order to make itself credible to the Tigre peasants.[1] By annihilating the E.P.R.P., the *Dirgue* also eliminated the prospects of any progressive solution to the national question.

As a result, the national movements which held out longest were those of a reactionary variety, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front being the only possible exception. Nearly all of them appealed to the traditional peasant (or pastorialist) animosity to Amharic hegemony, and this swelled their numbers handsomely. In the process, the peasantry became the political cannon-fodder for ethnic counter-revolutionary movements which had as little patience for the *Dirgue* as they had for its Marxist opponents.[2] In its heyday (1976–7) the Ethiopian Democratic Union (E.D.U.) under the nobleman Ras Mengesha Seyoum, managed to draw large peasant support from Tigre, Begemdir, and Siemen, often under traditional command. By another account, 'Wallo peasants joined the traditional ruler of Lasta [Lalibela] Dejaz-match Berhane Maskal Desta' in arms.[3] In the East, Afar nomads under the command of the son of their deposed Sultan, Ali Mirrah, engaged in anti-government banditry. Although the military régime could keep such

[1] On the declaration of war on *all* Amharas by the supposedly 'Marxist' Tigre People's Liberation Front, see *E.P.R.P. News Release*, 22 May 1978. Previously the T.P.L.F. and the E.P.R.P. had fought jointly against the *Dirgue*.

[2] Lenin was aware of this danger and hence the need for village soviets and mechanisation of agriculture to prevent the poor peasant becoming a follower of *kulak* opportunism. Gramsci also saw the danger posed by newly liberated peasantry: 'It [land] satisfied for the first moment his [peasant's] primitive greed for land; but at the next moment when he realized that his own arms are not enough to break up the soil which only dynamite can break up, when he realizes that seeds are needed and fertilizers and tools, and thinks of the future series of days and nights to be spent on a piece of land without a house, without water, with malaria, the peasant realizes his own impotence...and becomes a brigand and not a revolutionary, becomes an assassin of the gentry, not a fighter for workers' and peasants' communism.' Quoted in James Joll, *Gramsci* (London, 1977), p. 69. [This seems true of Ethiopia where the régime had proved incapable of providing seeds or equipment to the peasants, something rich peasants and even former landlords exploited to the fullest.]

[3] *African Contemporary Record, 1976–7*, p. B180.

movements at bay by armed force, it was quite evident by 1977 that the soldiers were incapable of achieving victory in Eritrea and the Ogaden. Having been caught in a trap of its own making, the *Dirgue* was forced to depend heavily on Soviet fire power and Cuban soldiers. In the process, the régime proclaimed its Marxist–Leninist character even louder, it actions to the contrary notwithstanding.

CONCLUSION

The social forces behind the overthrow of the monarchy in 1974 had the vision of a democratic future devoid of feudal backwardness and oppression. Whether it was possible to proceed from there to a socialist transformation of society was rendered entirely academic by the rise of a military dictatorship reminiscent of Bonapartism, devoid of any popular class base, and beholden to the Soviet Union. The ideals animating the revolution of 1974 had been betrayed.

After 1975, the dominant faction of the *Dirgue* tried to carry out a capitalist revolution in a land without capitalists. Historically this mission has involved the destruction of seigneurial power, the redistribution and even nationalisation of land,[1] the creation of a centralised administration (as exemplified in Ethiopia by 'peasant associations', and wars against secession), and industrialisation. As we have seen, the military rode to power on the crest of a popular Marxist-influenced uprising. For this reason it had to maintain a façade of Marxist rhetoric even as it was eliminating Marxists and brutalising labour. From the 'right' the threat of a bourgeois-landlord counter-revolution, supported by factions of the military, still loomed large. This is what prompted the massacres of November 1974 in which the Chairman of the Provincial Military Administrative Council, General Aman Andom, was killed. So too with the elimination of the Head of State, Teferi Benti, in February 1977, the assassination of the *Dirgue* Vice-Chairman, Atnafu Abate, in November of the same year, and the liquidation of one half of the original 120 members of the *Dirgue*. Try as hard as it could, the *Dirgue* – or what remained of it – could not muster a popular domestic base.[2] External support became a must.

[1] On the break-up of feudal estates in Russia, see V. I. Lenin, 'The Agrarian Question in Russia', in *Collected Works*, Vol. xx, p. 376: 'Marx amply proved that bourgeois economists often demanded *nationalization* of land, i.e. conversion of all land into public property, and that this measure was a *fully bourgeois* measure. Capitalism will develop more widely, more freely and more quickly under such a measure.'

[1] A lot of official propaganda centred on three 'clandestine' but officially sanctioned 'Marxist parties': S.E.D.E.D., M.A.L.E.R.I.D., and W.A.S.L.E.A.G.U.E. These were, in fact, little more than acronyms for bureaucratic cliques and cabals; S.E.D.E.D., for example,

When Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam arrived at the Kremlin in the spring of 1977, he must have been fully aware of this brutal fact. What the military Government needed were two things: armed force to suppress domestic *class* opponents and *national* movements, and capital investment. While the U.S. had proved amenable to providing military equipment and capital to the Ethiopian Government (even with the knowledge of internal repression), it could not – after Vietnam – provide military assistance to subdue national guerrilla movements. But the Soviet Union could. Hence the Soviet–Cuban *blitzkrieg* against the Somalis in the Ogaden during March 1978, and the military occupation of all the towns in Eritrea by March 1979. In the cities, red terror needed red armaments to triumph.

After this, the military became increasingly preoccupied with the development of state capitalism. The exhortation to extract maximum output (i.e. surplus value) in the industrial sector came daily from the state-controlled media. The régime's biggest economic headache, however, was the sagging productivity in agriculture. On the fourth anniversary of the revolution, Colonel Mengistu criticised the peasantry for not producing enough for the market, and also for hoarding. At any rate, international finance capital was already penetrating peasant small-holdings and pastoralism the same way it had in Kenya, Tanzania, and elsewhere.[1] In the nationalised state farms, the doubling of production was being demanded in March 1979, and managers were advised to restrict their bank credit and 'to rigidly control special benefits and overtime pay for workers'.[2] Soviet expertise and credit were being used to extend state farms,[3] because the régime's biggest concern was to expand agricultural production under state control. Whichever way one looked at it, this was the development of capitalism in the long run at the expense of the peasantry.

With regard to this, nothing really distinguished the Provisional Military Administrative Council from other highly bureaucratised régimes in history which have carried out industrialisation and modernised agriculture, except the *degree* of repression and the extermination of the revolutionary intelligentsia. More young revolutionaries died under the *Dirgue* than during the régime of Haile Selassie. Those like Peter

was known as 'Mengistu's own party'. Refugees from Addis Ababa in April 1979 reported dozens of W.A.S.L.E.A.G.U.E. members slain in these inter-clique struggles in December 1978. For an official and timid view of these events, see *Africa*, April 1979, p. 43.

[1] See, for instance, the particulars of the $24 million I.D.A. loan reported in *Nairobi Times*, 7 May 1978.

[2] *The Standard*, 20 March 1979.

[3] According to ibid. 18 April 1979, the U.S.S.R. lent Ethiopia the equivalent of U.S. $85 million to purchase Soviet equipment and expertise for agricultural mechanisation.

Schwab who argue that there had to be oppression for the revolution to triumph,[1] pity the plumage but forget the dying bird. Mao may indeed have taught us that 'the revolution is not a dinner party', but he also meant that the revolution is not a *coup d'état*, particularly aimed against the most progressive forces in society who sacrificed so much in the hope of a better life.

[1] See Peter Schwab, 'Human Rights in Ethiopia', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, XIV, 1, March 1976, pp. 155–60.